



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

The history of Alexandria's own beef industry

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Image: Aerial photograph. Photo, Office of Historic Alexandria.

It's hard to believe that Alexandria was once the scene of western-style cattle drives, but for nearly a century this was common along Duke Street in the area just southeast of what is today the King Street Metro station.

In 1792, Lawrence Hooff purchased a five-acre parcel of West End land from John West that stretched from King Street southward to Duke, and from what is now Peyton Street east of the creek that became known as Hooff's Run, now enclosed in a concrete culvert underneath the King Street Gardens and Daingerfield Road.



At the time, the Alexandria corporate limits were just a few blocks to the east of the property at the edge of Fairfax County, and Prince Street had not yet been extended westward through the property. The low-lying land was comprised of a large grass-covered meadow, kept fresh with periodic washovers when waters rose in the adjacent creek.

Lawrence Hooff recognized that the open grassland with water access was perfect for development into a cattle storage facility and slaughterhouse. Steer would be walked to Alexandria along the Little River Turnpike from as far away as the Shenandoah Valley to what soon became known as Hooff's Meadow. There they would then be stored, fattened and ultimately killed for distribution to nearby butchers who dispersed the meat at the local market or at the port.

Hooff's Run was a constant nuisance to early Alexandrians. Even with small bridges over the creek, the water course frequently shifted depending on the river tides, rising across nearby streets and inhibiting passage along King and Duke streets. But the West End butchers seized on this calamity each fall, damming a portion of the crested waters in a field north of King Street to create a pond where ice could be harvested in the winter months.

By the 1830s, four buildings stood on the Hooff property; a hog house, stable, hay barn and the slaughterhouse, located close to the corner of King Street and Diagonal Road. The facility remained in the Hooff family throughout the Civil War, but when the war ended the widowed owner, Martha J. Hooff,



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put the property up for sale and moved to Maryland with her children. It would be six years before the sale to an adjacent landowner, Townsend Baggett, would be executed.

Baggett lived and farmed land on the north side of King Street, where years later one of Alexandria's first ball fields, Baggett's Stadium, would be built. As seen in this 1927 aerial photo, Baggett's Stadium can be seen just to the left of center at the top of the photo, and south of King Street, Hooff's Run meanders past what remains of the meadow in the center of the view.

In 1937, soon after Prince Street was cut through the parcel and development of the site intensified, longtime Alexandria resident R.E. Lee Tyler wrote about his early memories of the original West End of Alexandria, describing the upper end of King Street by the late 19th century in great detail:

"This meadow was owned by the late Townsend Baggett. It was a great place in winter for sledding, as our winters in those days were very severe. How often have I seen this meadow filled with cattle and horses? These horses were owned by men who made their living with them by hauling and other ways. They would turn these horses in the pasture on Saturday evening and leave them there until Sunday evening late; this was during spring, summer and fall."

"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by Amy Bertsch, former Public Information Officer, and Lance Mallamo, Director, on behalf of the Office of Historic Alexandria.